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## Camp Center: The Big Red One

Fort Riley

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BIG RED ONE  
*Casing the Colors*

*Courtesy of Fort Riley*

## *Camp Center: The Big Red One*



The enduring ties between Kansas and the US Army on the Great Plains began well before Kansas was admitted to the Union on January 29, 1861. The frontier outpost we know as Fort Riley was originally called Camp Center due to its central geographical location in the United States. Camp Center had been in place since 1853.

The seeds of two Flint Hills communities were planted by March 1855: Junction City – located at the junction of the Republican and Smoky Hill rivers – and Manhattan. In 1857 Manhattan’s incorporation was complete, with Junction City following in 1859 by virtue of a special act by the Kansas Territorial Legislature. As Fort Riley grew, so did these communities around the prairie post - a trend repeated several times over the next 160 years.

The end of the Civil War in 1865 witnessed Fort Riley regaining importance in providing protection to railroad lines being built across Kansas. Brevet Major General George A. Custer arrived at Fort Riley in December 1866 to take charge of the new 7th Cavalry Regiment; at the same time, the Union Pacific Railroad reached the post. The Flint Hills community experienced some short-term growth. As the line of settlement extended westward

each spring, the post lost some of its importance. Larger concentrations of troops were stationed at Fort Larned, Fort Hays, and other points west.

Fort Riley's role as the major source of protection for the plains waned by the mid-1800s and a transition to a new role as a "school house" post began. The Cavalry and Light Artillery School was established on post, and for the next seven decades, thousands of soldiers learned state-of-the-art warfighting skills in the Flint Hills.

## A STORIED DIVISION ARRIVES

In 1955 Fort Riley transitioned from a training and educational center to the home of a major infantry division - the 1st Infantry Division, also known as the "Big Red One," the oldest and most illustrious division in the US Army. Elements of the Big Red One began arriving in July 1955, initially occupying barracks located in Camp Funston. The influx of soldiers and families placed new demands on infrastructure, both at the post and in neighboring Flint Hills communities.

Work began on Custer Hill, where new quarters, barracks, and work areas were constructed. A new hospital, named in honor of Major General B.J.D. Irwin, was constructed to provide medical care.

In the decade following, 1st Infantry Division units trained to respond to any threat that might arise in Europe or other parts of the world. Construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis the following year brought a heightened alert for soldiers stationed at Fort Riley.

An additional 50,000 acres were acquired in 1966, which enabled the Army to have an adequate training area for the division's two brigades.

Increased guerrilla insurgency in South Vietnam during the mid-1960s led to the deployment of the 1st Infantry Division to Southeast Asia. The leading element, the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, left in July 1965, with the division headquarters arriving in South Vietnam in September.

Following nearly five years of combat in Vietnam, the 1st Infantry Division

returned to Fort Riley in April 1970 and assumed the NATO commitment. During the 1970s and the 1980s, 1st Infantry Division soldiers were periodically deployed on REFORGER exercises. Reserve Officer Training Corps summer camps were also held at the post, which permitted troops to demonstrate and teach their skills to aspiring second lieutenants.

In August 1990 Iraq invaded its neighbor, Kuwait. The resulting international outcry led to the largest US troop buildup and deployment overseas since the Vietnam War. In the fall of that year, Fort Riley was notified to begin mobilization of troops and equipment for deployment to the Persian Gulf. Between November 1990 and January 1991, soldiers and equipment were deployed overseas.

Following Operation Desert Storm, the 1st Infantry Division returned to Fort Riley. However, world events significantly altered the Army's traditional mission. The collapse of Eastern European communist states and the end of the Soviet Union signaled the end

of the Cold War and the beginning of new global challenges for the United States. Long-held ethnic tensions in the Balkans threatened regional stability. In accordance with the Dayton Peace Accords, American, NATO, and Russian forces deployed to the region to restore peace in that troubled corner of Europe.

In the spring of 1995, Headquarters of the 1st Infantry Division were transferred from Fort Riley to Leighton Barracks in Germany. Shortly after its arrival, the Big Red One assumed peace enforcement responsibilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina in support of Operations Joint Endeavor/Guard. The division deployed to the Balkans twice in 1999, first as part of Task Force Sabre in Macedonia, then in Kosovo with NATO's Task Force Falcon on June 10. This contingent patrolled the streets and countryside of Kosovo until June 2000, when it turned the mission over to the 1st Armored Division.

In January 2003 the division primed itself for Operation Iraqi Freedom and in March 2003 took on a more direct



BIG RED ONE AT THE  
MANHATTAN VETERANS DAY PARADE

role. The 1st Battalion, 63rd Armored Regiment deployed to northern Iraq. Operating in the Sunni Triangle, Task Force 1-63 conducted combat operations while simultaneously helping to bring stability to the region.

As Task Force 1-63 returned home to Germany in February 2004, the rest of the 1st Infantry Division and Task Force Danger deployed to northern Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 1st Infantry Division's Task Force Danger consisted of Germany-based 1st Infantry Division units along with the 30th Brigade Combat Team "Old Hickory" based in North Carolina, and the 25th Infantry

Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team from Hawaii. As part of the Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC) of 2005, the division cased its colors in Germany July 7, 2006.

### WELCOME BACK

Fort Riley proudly welcomed the Big Red One home in August 2006. The Big Red One's return from Germany marked a new chapter in the illustrious history of Fort Riley. Significant changes began to take place. The construction of a new division headquarters, the erection of barracks and dining facilities on Custer Hill and Camp Whitside, improvement of runways and additional hangars at Marshall Army Airfield, and the creation

of new housing units in the Camp Forysth area marked the transformation of the post yet again.

Today, Fort Riley is home to five brigades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and brings to the nation's defense a trained and ready mix of armor, infantry, aviation, and combat support capabilities. The Big Red One also commands units at Fort Knox, Kentucky, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Fort Riley also is the professional home of more than 19,000 soldiers, 24,750 family members and 7,800 civilian workers.

These soldiers, families, and civilians have been warmly welcomed by their northern Flint Hills neighbors. Certainly the more than 50,000 people connected to Fort Riley provide meaningful support to local economies. The post's total direct spending in the region in fiscal year 2012 was \$1,876,978,070, including \$1.28 billion in payroll; \$282 million in supplies, services, and contracts; \$155 million in construction, and \$78.3

million in outsourced patient care (medical and dental).

In the last ten years Fort Riley has worked hard to be more than just a landowner in Kansas – it has become a community partner. It can be said that Fort Riley's place amid its Flint Hills neighbors not only bears the fruit of mutual benefit for the region but also exists as a crucial asset to the nation's economy and national defense.

The post's closest neighbors are Geary, Potawatomie, and Riley counties. In addition to Junction City and Manhattan, soldiers and civilians at Fort Riley make their homes throughout additional neighboring counties in such diverse communities as Abilene, Alma, Chapman, Clay Center, Council Grove, Milford, Ogden, Riley, Salina, Wakefield, and Wamego. Partnerships with these communities are why Fort Riley, the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and the neighboring Flint Hills regions are thriving.

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*Attributed to Fort Riley*